

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR
ASSURING THE PUBLIC
HEALTH:
COMMUNICATION,
SURVEILLANCE, AND
REGULATION**

PM3001144091

***A Psychological Perspective
on Cigarette Advertising
and Promotion***

Paul Slovic, PhD

PM3001144092

A Psychological Perspective on Cigarette
Advertising and Promotion

Paul Slovic
Decision Research
1201 Oak Street
Eugene, OR 97401
pslovic@oregon.uoregon.edu

Abstract

A great deal of evidence indicates that human thinking and decision making result from the interaction between two distinct cognitive systems. The *experiential* system is intuitive, automatic, natural, and fast. The *analytic* system is deliberative, reason based, and slow. One of the distinguishing characteristics of the experiential system is its dependence upon imagery that has become associated with affect (positive or negative feelings). Recent surveys of more than 3000 persons (smokers and non-smokers) ages 14 and older demonstrate that the decision to start smoking is based primarily upon experiential thinking. Young people give little or no conscious thought to risk when they begin to smoke. They appear to be lured into the behavior by the prospects of fun and excitement. Most begin to think of risk only after becoming smokers and gaining what to them is new information about health risks. When asked, "If you had it to do over again, would you start smoking?", more than 85% of adult smokers and 80% of young smokers answer "No." The fact that this repudiation of the decision to smoke is more frequent among those who have been smoking for the longest time, those who are currently smoking the most cigarettes, those who perceive themselves at higher risk from smoking, those who have tried most often to quit, and those who acknowledge their addiction, paints a sad portrait of individuals who are unable to control a behavior that they have come to recognize as harmful. Cigarette advertising and promotion plays a key role in this process by exposing young people to massive amounts of positive imagery associated with smoking. Research in psychology and cognitive neuroscience demonstrates how powerful such imagery can be in suppressing perception of risk and manipulating behavior. These new insights argue for stricter control on all cigarette advertising and promotion, to the point of prohibition of such practices.